



Wabash pigtoe

Fusconaia flava

Kingdom: Animalia
Division/Phylum: Mollusca
Class: Bivalvia

Features

The shell of the Wabash pigtoe mussel is highly variable. It is moderately thick and triangular in shape, but is compressed in creeks and small rivers and “inflated” in large rivers. The anterior end is rounded and the posterior is bluntly pointed. There is a wide, shallow depression on each side of the shell. The shell is red, yellow, or brown and has a cloth-like texture. There are faint green rays on the shell in younger mussels. Older mussel shells are dark brown. The inside of the shell is white or a faint pink color and is iridescent toward the posterior end. The Wabash pigtoe may grow to three inches long.

Natural History

The Wabash pigtoe is found in creeks to large rivers in mud, sand, or gravel. Freshwater mussel distribution in Iowa is not well documented. They have an elaborate reproductive system. During spawning, males release sperm into the water. The sperm are drawn inside the female's shell, where they fertilize eggs in her body. The fertilized eggs develop into larvae (glochidia) and are stored for a time in the female's gills. When the glochidia mature, the female

generally expels them into the water where they must attach as parasites to the gills or fins of fish. Larvae remain on the host fish for a period of weeks or months. Young mussels then detach from their host and drop to the bottom of the body of water. Hosts for this mussel include several widespread, common fish. Mussels are filter-feeders, bringing in water and the organic matter it contains through the incurrent siphon, filtering the particles out, then sending the rest of the water away from the body through the excurrent siphon. Particles filtered include plankton and detritus. Mature mussels spend most of their lives, which range from 10 to 100 years, partially or wholly buried in the bottom substrate.

Habitats

Mississippi River, interior rivers and streams

Iowa Status

common; native

Iowa Range

northeastern three-fourths of Iowa

Bibliography

Iowa Department of Natural Resources. 2001.
Biodiversity of Iowa: Aquatic Habitats CD-ROM.